

# J. E. CUMMINS OBE, MEMORIAL ORATION

## PREFACE

Our Society, and the Sciences Club before us have been well served by our Cummins Memorial Orators, and this year's Orator, John Stocker, has maintained the expected high standard in the finest of styles.

Dr Stocker is a well-tempered scientist—using here the metallurgical sense of the phrase. A Melbourne medical graduate, his career was forged overseas in private-sector research, and then quenched/reheated as the first Chief Executive of CSIRO to be appointed from outside the Organisation.

Serving two masters, one hierarchical and one political, and looking after a flock which ranged from cooperative to recalcitrant in the face of change, must have honed his skills in many ways. It certainly will have taught him to think-through his public statements, and to make sure they are soundly-based. This is very much to our benefit, as will be seen when you read the printed version of his Oration.

Life now, as Director of Research and Innovation for Pratt Industries, must seem somewhat less tempestuous than it was during the previous half-decade. Again we are the beneficiaries, because less time spent putting out fires has meant more time to think in depth about Australia's future.

Lastly, for those readers who were not present for the oration on 18 July 1996, the title of his talk is made clear at the end. *Lucy's Choice* is a far-sighted paper; and it will be of real assistance to those who have a part of Australia's destiny in their hands.

## J. E. CUMMINS

The inaugural Oration of the Sciences Club took place in 1974, the Orator being Sir Louis Matheson. Thus a tradition was begun which has continued each year without interruption until the present time.

In 1989, following the death of J. E. Cummins OBE, the title of the Oration was changed to the J. E. Cummins OBE Memorial Oration to honour the man who was principally responsible for the erection of the National Science Centre which was completed in 1967.

In the early 1960s the idea was conceived within the CSIRO in which J. E. Cummins was a senior scientist, of a building which would house Scientific, Technological and Learned Societies at a reasonable rental. It was envisaged that the Centre would provide the opportunity for the interchange of ideas and a furtherance of knowledge.

J. E. Cummins (Jack as he was known), was personally responsible for raising most of the funds to build the National Science Centre, known also as Clunies Ross House. He approached many individuals and large and small corporations both here and overseas and his success can be judged from the fact that, when completed, the building was free of debt.

It was Jack who conceived the idea that Clunies Ross House should contain a venue where members of various Scientific and Technological Societies could meet in an informal manner. Thus it was that The Sciences Club became the social centre of Clunies Ross House.

Jack became the inaugural President of The Sciences Club in 1968. He was appointed to the Board of Governors of Clunies Ross House in 1971, retiring in the year of his death.

A change in the philosophy of the Board of Governors in the late 1980s resulted in The Sciences Club vacating Clunies Ross House in July 1990 and merging with the Royal Society of Victoria on 1 January 1991.

It is sad to reflect on the disintegration and demise of such a wonderful and idealistic concept. The Scientific, Technological and Learned Societies are once more scattered throughout Melbourne and the National Science Centre at 191 Royal Parade, Parkville has been partly demolished and redesigned as an apartment block.

MARGARET C. HARRIS  
President of The Sciences Club 1990–1991